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ABSTRACT

In 1966, the Arkansas Education Association (AEA) presented a plan to consolidate school districts by dissolving all school districts with less than 400 students. The proposal spawned an enormous debate, and opponents organized a political action committee named the Arkansas Rural Education Association (AREA). The issues involved were: (1) the proposal threatened local control of education; (2) rural communities could not thrive without their own school districts; (3) students would spend excessive time on buses; (4) the debt burden of consolidation was unbearable; and (5) forced consolidation was a desecration of the democratic process. When AEA argued that rural schools were costlier, AREA countered with the fact that the 129 small schools affected by the proposal cost $135,000 above the minimum funding formula while the 12 largest districts cost $730,000 above the formula. AEA's claim that rural schools could not adequately educate students was rebutted by the fact that small school districts only had 10 percent of the total school age population, yet provided over 10 percent of the honor students in higher education. AREA gave people with little experience in state politics a voice. By infusing the consolidation issue into every political race in the state, and by effectively using the media to get their message out, AREA resoundingly defeated the proposal. AREA has continued to provide rural citizens a vehicle for voicing the needs of rural educational systems. (TD)

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by
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The Consolidation Battle of 1966 and the Creation of the Arkansas Rural Education Association

Brian Irby

Consolidation has been an issue in Arkansas educational policy since the 1940s. The issue has spurred debate on its merits for a number of years. The issue at hand in such contests was whether a small school district could remain independent and free from domination by large school districts. The debate has come down to whether or not a community can continue to thrive without its own school district, which in many of the rural communities in Arkansas is the main unifying structure. This work will deal with one particular proposal in 1966 which spawned a debate and the formation of the Arkansas Rural Education Association. This new organization would go on to have a significant impact on the campaign against the measure, and would go on to survive and grow into an organization pledged to protect the interests of small school districts.

In early 1966, the Arkansas Education Association, headquartered in Little Rock presented a plan to consolidate those districts it felt were not living up to modern educational standards. The proposal, with the official title Proposed Initiated Act to Reorganize School Districts or Proposed Act #1, would spawn one of the largest controversies in educational policy in 1966. The first section of the

act stated that as of June 1, 1967, all school districts with less than 400 students in enumeration "are hereby dissolved" and those dissolved districts would be annexed by larger districts. This was a drastic measure and one would think that, under the national legal system, those districts that would be affected by the actions would have wide opportunity to appeal the order. This was not so. Section two, which provided for appeals, bound the districts to such a narrow avenue of appeal that would make the question of legality of the action a moot point. For instance, the act specified that the judge presiding over the appeal "shall sit without a jury and may hear oral arguments and receive written briefs but no new evidence may be introduced or offered in Circuit Court except to correct omissions or errors in the record." Thus, the proposal allowed for appeal, but those districts that wished decisions to be reconsidered could not present any evidence that they had a quality functioning educational system despite their low enumeration. The original decision by the State Board would in effect be the final word on the issue and there was little the local district leaders could do about it. Not only would any district with a low student population in June, 1967 be eliminated, but also all districts who fell below 400 in the future be eliminated as well. The first shot was fired with this act, but the opposition would soon unite to fight the measure.

One evening, the exact date is lost to history, Wade Ozbirn, an administrator of the White County School District, sat with James Martin, Superintendent of

Beedeville Schools, in Ozbirn's kitchen. As they lamented the sad events that had occurred on the floor of the Arkansas Education Association a month earlier, they both simultaneously received one of those great flashes of lightning which spawns great organizations. Influencing Martin and Ozbirn were reports from Texas that a similar consolidation measure had been soundly defeated by anti-consolidation partisans who had organized themselves into what could be called political action committees designed to raise money, buy newspaper advertising, and "get out the vote." Why could not such a strategy work with Arkansans? Ozbirn, taking out a pen, began to write a letter that would be distributed to those administrators who would be effected by the consolidation conspiracy. Without restating the case against consolidation, the letter instead simply asked the various superintendents and school board members whether or not they would be interested in joining a new organization of rural public schools (a population of 1100 was the maximum criteria for eligibility).

Having sent out the letters, the two administrators awaited the response. What came back was more than a few trickles-- a large avalanche of support poured into the mailboxes of Ozbirn and Martin. The pile of letters attested to the enthusiasm that swept through the small school districts to take a stand against the consolidation movement and its adherents. According to Ozbirn, the response was slanted 95 percent against the initiative, signifying the "elated" feelings of small

school administrators for a combined assault against those who would strip them of their beloved districts. With such a mandate for creating an advocacy organization to defend the rights of the small districts, Martin and Ozbirn set out to make the organization come to life. Since this organization would represent hundreds of administrators, teachers, and children, Martin and Ozbirn both agreed that the organization should be formed by the people and not by themselves alone. In accordance with this principle, the two invited the officials from districts that would be affected by the proposed legislation to a pilot meeting in Searcy, Arkansas.

Wade Ozbirn quickly became the most outspoken of the anti-consolidation movement, and he earned his place as official spokesman for the organization. Ozbirn was a forty-one year old administrator for the White County Central School District when he accepted the position of spokesman for the organization. Ozbirn's fear of the consolidation movement had much to do with his belief that White County would soon experience a population boom. Hindsight justifies him in this assumption when one considers the growth of Searcy over the last two decades. Projecting ahead, Ozbirn prophesied to the Arkansas Gazette that if the consolidation plans were implemented, then the urban boom in would cripple the county. Where would the new students go to school? And if they did find a school, then how would they be able to get transportation to bus all the children such far

distances? "If we can maintain these schools for another decade then it will solve a big problem. The buildings will already be there. If we don't do it, the people will be looking for classrooms outside town, right where these are." he stated. Ozbirn told the reporter that the rural schools were not against all consolidation. By no means would the organization oppose all consolidation measures without prejudice. Instead, "All of us believe that some consolidation is necessary. The programs can be enriched in some areas. We only believe that it ought to be left up to the people who are familiar with their local school problems." The problem, in other words, lie in the way consolidation plans are managed. Bureaucrats in Little Rock should not decide the fate of the schools elsewhere in the state. That should be a decision for superintendents in those targeted schools. With such a firm understanding of the issues involved, Ozbirn was a key asset to the Arkansas Rural Education Association.

On December 13, 1965, the Arkansas Rural Education Association was born in what Ozbirn called a "sounding board session." The attendants, despite the low turn-out, were from a variety of small towns in central Arkansas. Of the twenty-seven people who attended, five different counties, all from the central part of the state, were represented which set a precedent for the way the state organization would be planned: with the power structure of the organization residing locally as opposed to the state wide organization of the Arkansas Education Association. The

State School Board would be the model which would guide the structuring of the new organization. The state was divided into fifteen districts, each with its own local leadership. At the top of the hierarchy would be an executive board which would be made up of thirty representatives (two representatives from each of the fifteen districts). The school superintendent and a school board would make up the representative delegation.

The so-called "sounding board session" also built a platform which would set plain the tenets of the organization. One overriding theme in the platform was the idea that the school system should be as democratic as possible; more specifically, the outline of thought embodied in the platform stressed the need to help the small rural schools in the search for equity with the larger school districts. The official creed emphasized the need of small schools to "work with Senators and Representatives" to promote "legislation that would help us to upgrade and enrich our school program to the point that this group would not come under constant attack." In that democratic vein, the platform called for an equitable distribution of money for transportation. It also demanded an equitable teacher salary, which could only be accomplished by a more equitable teacher salary system. More specifically related to the current controversy surrounding the consolidation issue, the platform stated that the organization would "Work to promote the principles of democratic rule. For example, we believe that on an issue that would destroy a community, the

people within that community should help decide their own fate." In a broad statement that was intended to appeal to patriotism, the platform ended with a declaration that they would "secure state-wide policies that would require school people from the university level down to the remotest village school to be in sympathy with our democratic system of government. We feel that we should continue the moral climate that has made us become the greatest and strongest nation on earth today." In other words, if one wanted to preserve the democratic form of government, then one should support the Arkansas Rural Education Association.

It was apparent to the attendees that organizations die without proper advertising and Ozbirn quickly addressed the issue. He called for the new members to go to "various groups and acquaint them with the ideas presented and to let them know what is being talked about and done in connection with this organization." What should the AREA members tell the possible recruits? Ozbirn laid out a general creed that would guide the members in their "missionary" efforts. The first thing that they should tell potential members is that the organization is not a separatist group. This was apparently a large concern for members of the AEA that did not want to withdraw from the larger organization for a very important reason. Ozbirn spelled out the reason simply, "An organization is not made stronger by division." The new organization was not being created out of disgust or hatred,

instead, it was created in order to express the unique concerns of rural schools in the state. Also, the attendants were in agreement that dual membership in both organizations would be beneficial in stopping any proposals that might be introduced at AEA meetings. In order to encourage dual membership, the attendees proposed that the organization should make it plain that "anyone is free to be a member of the AEA or not to be." The second thing that the missionaries were to tell possible recruits was that the group is "interested in democracy and local control," no doubt something that would appeal to schools that were marginalized by the power interests in Little Rock. Apart from the general business of creating the new entity, the meeting also addressed its concerns on the consolidation bill. One thing that was discussed at length was who was to blame for the proposed act, and some thought that there was a large scale conspiracy in the state government. One person in specific thought that the bill possibly came from within the powerful state department. In that vein, it was considered that "the SD [State Department] is using Mr. Rozzell to take the blame from Governor Faubus or other state officials." Such a plot is unsubstantiated, but nevertheless it was considered as a possible explanation for the lack of governmental response to the controversy. Plus, the idea that the state department might be using the AEA to meet its own agenda was a constant source for speculation in this era of states' rights

With the growing controversy surrounding the consolidation act, the

supporters of the initiative began to feel the pressure from all sides. Likewise, other education organizations began to feel themselves being ripped apart in the growing dispute. One organization is representative of the heightening of tensions during 1966. On February 9, Hubert H. Blanchard, executive secretary of the Arkansas Education Association, and Frank Cannaday of the state education department met at the annual convention of the Arkansas School Boards association to defend the initiative and they realized the growing anxiety over the bill. Their exhortations were taken into consideration as the convention adopted a resolution that seemingly supported the reorganization of schools on a quality and not quantity basis. However, it became clear as the resolution was debated that the convention was fully behind the AEA. One key phrase in the document sheds light on the resolution's "hidden" meaning: districts should be reorganized "that are unable to offer a quality school program due to their limited enrollment"; in order to fulfill this objective, the state department of education should propose legislation "that will raise the quality standards for all schools to at least the minimum." A careful reader can discern that the convention was clearly backing Initiated Act #1, even borrowing key phrases from the document. One of the people in attendance at the convention was James Martin, who was not about to let Blanchard and Cannaday go without a fight. The official line of argument for the initiative was that schools with fewer than 400 students were unfit to provide a proper education, but just where did this

numerical figure come from, asked Martin. Blanchard, a shrewd politician, leaped to his defense by vaguely stating that the figure was adopted out of consideration of the "almost 40,000 school children who need improved opportunities most." Realizing that his question had not been answered, Martin pressed Blanchard into admitting that the figure had been adopted after reading the findings of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools on small schools. Martin, in pure legal style, asked him if he realized that the study's commissioner, Peabody College for Teachers, had recommended schools with less than 1000 students to be eliminated. This brought a lot of hemming and hawing from Blanchard who then tied to reconcile his position, "I think perhaps a case could be made for 1,000 -- I'm not at all sure that 400 is the ideal number, educationally. But, it is something that will pass." The last phrase brought many to their feet: it was becoming clearer that the AEA might someday push the number higher (Ben Brann of the Jackson County Board of Education wrote a couple of days later, "the intentions are clear -- divide and conquer"); it all depended on how much the public would agree to The true fallacy of the legislation grew more apparent as the debate raged. One person stood up and openly opined that the State Department of Education might be behind the plan. Clearly rattled, Blanchard fumbled again when he admitted that he had spent "several months trying to write quality into the law, and we just don't know how to do it." In that one moment, Blanchard had clearly admitted that the bill was not

necessarily written with quality in mind.

With their opponents clearly on the ropes, the anti-consolidation forces began to converge into a cohesive state-wide organization. The "missionaries" had been very successful in recruiting new members and it was time to begin the assault on the initiated act. Wade Ozbirn booked a meeting room at the Hotel Marion in Little Rock on February 19, to hold what would be the first state-wide meeting of the AREA. Rex Bayless, president of the Cotter School Board in Baxter County, summed up the new organization for local reporters by stating in the Baxter Bulletin that the AREA is "a permanent organization of schools that want to upgrade and enrich their own school programs through methods that have been impossible for them up until this time. . . It will work with the legislature to help upgrade and enrich our school programs so that the smaller schools would not come under constant attack. It will work for more equitable distribution of state aid for transportation and other equalization programs, and will try to upgrade teachers' salaries." If the AREA ever needed a workable creed, this was it. Every tenet that the leaders believed in were spelled out in simple language by Bayless.

The meeting started on a bad note. Due to a mix up in the hotel's reservations, the AREA was assigned to a tiny room which was not large enough to hold the leadership of the various districts, much less the rest of the attendants. However, once Ozbirn and Hershell Lee of Swifton inspected the room that should

have been theirs, they realized that it would not have been large enough either. So, in a scene reminiscent of John Wayne army movies, the AREA "troops" filed out of the hotel lobby and marched down the street to the National Investors Life Insurance Company building, where they were promised a large ballroom for the meeting. Once the members settled down in the ballroom, the meeting began. James A. Martin, superintendent of Beedeville Schools in Jackson County served as emcee and opened the meeting with a speech calling for schools with less than 1,000 pupils to form their own organization. The current status of the education system in Arkansas, Lee continued, means that "the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer." This situation is fostered by an educational hierarchy that only recognizes the rights of the larger, more urban schools. Thus, in order to express their own rights, the rural schools should unite and in a show of force, topple the existing educational elite. Martin repeated Ozbirn, et al., by clearly stating that the organization was not against all consolidation programs: Only those programs that are geared toward quality schools should be considered and anything else is unacceptable. "I am not justifying poor teachers, but I think school districts should be abolished on poor quality, not on numbers," he said. The meeting was off to an uproarious start and the enthusiasm would only be heightened as the afternoon continued.

The next speaker on the roster was the indefatigable Wade Ozbirn. Ozbirn

stepped up to the podium armed with a copy of Kiplinger Newsletter which contained an article which noted a trend in population distribution moving from the cities to the rural areas. Where would these families send their children when they do not have any local schools, asked Ozbirn rhetorically. The rural schools are necessary, he went on, because the schools will be needed for future growth. Ozbirn then moved to the subject of the facilities in the large school districts. The schools in the large districts will not be able to deal with the influx of rural children who will be forced to attend them. Ozbirn averred, "When you put the locks on the doors of 100 schools you are going to bring on a crowded situation elsewhere. That means that the taxpayers are going to have to be paying for new school buildings the next 15 years." The situation would be bad for everyone involved. Along with the price tag for the new school buildings, there would be the cost of transporting the rural children to the larger schools. Ozbirn ended his speech with a rousing commission for those present at the meeting to go back home and call their legislators and school board members and encourage them to fight the initiated act. Furthermore, the concerned people in the ballroom should get in touch with their representatives in the Arkansas Education Association and ask them to select delegates who would fight the measure at the AEA meeting on March 12.

Next on the schedule was State Representative Ode Maddox, who also happened to be superintendent of schools in Montgomery County, who continued

the theme that was set forth in Lee's oration. But, he added a political side to the call for action. "I think it behooves us to inject this issue into every political race in Arkansas from justice of the peace to governor," he argued. Not only should the concerned members work toward getting their representatives involved, but they should also speak loudly with their voting. Maddox added, "I think this group can make a big difference in thousands of votes. If they pass this proposal within 5 to 8 years, they will be abolishing all districts less than 1,000 students and within 10 years they will be abolishing about half of the counties in the state." The next item on the agenda was to elect officers. Maddox nominated Hershell Lee for the presidency and his nomination was seconded by George Kell, a former third baseman for the Detroit Tigers. The members present voted unanimously on for the nominee and James Martin was then elected as secretary.

After the successful "birth" of the organization, it was now time to get busy. The first red letter date that loomed large was the March 15 meeting of the AEA where the merits, or lack thereof, of the initiated act would be discussed and considered for approval. If the Counsel on Education, a special committee within the organization, approved of the act, then the AEA would lead a petition drive in order to get it on the general election ballot in November. Forrest Rozzell spear-headed the drive for approval by constantly speaking to the press and advertising the act as a good measure to promote educational opportunities for the children of

Arkansas. This was countered by the AREA forces who also spoke to the press frequently, putting most of their focus on the local newspapers in the smaller towns where they would be more likely to draw support for their opposition. And in the month of February, the AREA went on a state-wide media blitz to attack the initiated act. The fight was to grow even more heated as March 12 neared, but nothing was to hint at the strange turn of events that would take place at the meeting.

On March 12, the AEA's Council of Education met in Little Rock Central High School and began to discuss the merits of the act. In attendance was Ode Maddox, the state representative and AREA champion, who waited patiently to launch a startling ploy against the pro-consolidation forces. At the heart of the secret cabal was a little known professor from George Peabody College for Teachers at Nashville, Tennessee and former AEA president named W.D. McClurkin. After the initiated act was placed on the agenda, the aging president asked to be recognized and he was. When he mounted the dais to begin speaking, the tension grew as the delegates wondered what he would say. The tension was probably more pronounced because he was one of the authors of a recent study which suggested that consolidation should be implemented on districts that had fewer than 2000 students. McClurkin argued that the 400 student figure was inadequate and should be revised. In a speech which traced the development of the consolidation fight, he said the maximum figure for consolidation, which he favored, "was compromised

down to 350 in a move that was politically expedient but intellectually misleading and professionally wrong." Therefore, in order to preserve the spirit of his recommendations, it would be crucial to revise the figure upwards. The Council for Education was shocked and were at a loss at what to do. Eventually, the chair of the board called for the Rules of Order which guided the parliamentary procedures for the committee in order to focus on the direction that the council members were legally bound to take. McClurkin's recommendations, brought to the assembly in his persuasive oratory, led the Council to draw up an amendment which called for the Department of Education to "(1) Dissolve all districts enumerating less than 2,000 students; (2) Require each county board of education to submit a plan for annexing the territory of the dissolved districts to the State Board of Education for approval prior to annexation; (3) Provide for the future dissolution of any district which falls below 2,000 students; (4) Prevent the formation of new districts with less than 2,000 students; (5) Provide for the State Board to define and assist local school districts to maintain isolated schools, not isolated districts; (6) Provide for judicial appeal of annexation actions." No doubt such a measure would not be accepted by the small rural districts, but the amendment stood. All that was left was for the Council to approve it. The Council voted for the amendment 402 to 228. This move effectively destroyed any hope for the initiative being accepted by voters and Rozzell knew this.

Although it seemed that the consolidation forces were dealt a decisive blow by the coup de gras delivered at the AEA meeting, the fight was nowhere near a conclusion. Rozzell and his allies quickly regrouped; they began to push for placing the measure before the voters in the upcoming November election. The first move in Rozzell's plan to bring the issue before the people in Arkansas was to start a petition drive in order to get the issue on the November ballot. He sent a letter to Council delegates urging them to circulate petitions and asking them for an estimate of how many signatures each could guarantee. The delegates responded to the latter question that a dismal amount of signatures (less than 10 per cent needed for a petition to be successful) could be promised. The bad news sent Rozzell and the rest of the AEA leadership scrambling. They called together the Executive Committee to try to find a way to drum up support for the petition drive. They found a compromise. There would be no way the electorate would agree to the 2,000 figure, it must be dropped and the 400 figure must be reinstated. In order to relieve bruised egos, the Executive Council defended their actions by citing administrative problems with the 2,000 figure. It would be a nightmare to impose such a draconian measure, they asserted. Thus, they voted unanimously to drop the 2,000 student figure. Joshua Shepherd, whom Rozzell cited as a "long-time friend of public education", was appointed to spear-head the petition drive.

Karr Shannon, a writer for the Arkansas Democrat, wrote an editorial where

he urged voters to not sign the petitions. "Those sponsoring the petitions simply cannot guarantee that forced consolidation will ensure better instruction for the kiddies. All they can guarantee is more and longer bus routes, bigger school buildings and the consequential higher cost and bigger bonded indebtedness. It's a poor bet . . . a losing gamble . . . for the public schools." By July 8, 1966, Joshua K. Shepherd, chairman of the Arkansas Committee for Public Schools, and John A. Trice, Pine Bluff school superintendent were able to present Secretary of State Kelly Bryant with the petitions. At the official press conference after the meeting with Bryant, Shepherd arrogantly prophesied that the measure would be overwhelmingly approved by the voters by a margin of three to one. His prediction would prove false.

Seeing the inevitability of a voter referendum on the issue, AREA leaders began to form new strategies to combat the "forced" consolidation. James O'Dell noted in a letter sent to members that "there is no way to keep this issue off the ballot this fall so we must prepare now to defeat it at the polls." In order meet the challenge with a united front, the AREA created a sub-committee to organize the opposition troops made up of James O'Dell acting as chairman, and Lindsey Ladd, Charles Gray, and Lyle Wood rounding up the committee. While the AREA had only been active on a small scale, the political campaign of 1966 would hurl the organization into the larger political scene in a way that most of the members had

only read about. When one considers that most of the members of the AREA were small town superintendents with little real political experience, it seems like the campaign of 1966 would be impossible. Most of the members would have to be quick learners; after all, the seemingly rag-tag membership of this organization while it was still in its infancy were able to take on one of the largest political interest groups in the state— and win!

The AREA members set out on a crusade in the spring. Whereas the ancient crusade would spark its followers with religious zeal, the modern crusaders would be sparked with educational zeal based on the conviction that they should decide the future of their schools without the duress of an outside entity. The goal of these crusaders was to first win the minds and hearts of the people at the local level. To accomplish this goal, the sub-committee appointed a superintendent in each county to serve as county coordinator. The county coordinator's job was to seek out those school administrators and teachers who were in sympathy with the anti-consolidation fight and encourage them to join in the battle. They would speak before local civic clubs and send press releases and advertisements to local papers. James O'Dell stated the movement's goal in the simplest terms: "WITHOUT THE PEOPLE WE CANNOT WIN. THEY MUST BE WON FIRST." While the AREA was involved in coordinating their attack on the consolidation referendum, they also got involved in other issues in the spring of 1966. The most pressing issue

was the election of people to the state legislature that were amicable to the cause. Ode Maddox had argued that it was important to inject the consolidation issue into every campaign. This was what the AREA did. By putting the consolidation issue before all candidates, the AREA could expect a lively debate on the purposes of the initiation. In the minds of the leadership, if the consolidation issue were not discussed then voters might be apathetic to the plight of rural schools and would simply vote for the measure. The AREA intended to make sure that the issue was not buried under the pile of other worthy issues confronting the voting public that fall. Maddox urged in an early meeting of the AREA, "Just put it in every campaign. Get somebody that's on our side to run."

The most important race to the fledgling movement was the upcoming race for representation of Hot Springs where an avid supporter of the AREA, Ode Maddox found himself facing two opponents. Maddox had been a legislator for Montgomery County, but reapportioning had placed his district in Garland County, a much more urban setting than rural Montgomery. The AREA would see this race as symbolic in its drive to gain wide support in the state legislature. More specifically, the race was emblematic of what the members saw as the rising control of the legislature by the urban areas. Over the last few years prior to 1966, the state commission in charge of dividing the state into legislative districts had been redistricting areas of the state. The new districts often lumped urban and rural

territories together under a single representative. Believing that they could only gain support in the legislature from rural legislators, the AREA leadership became alarmed that the better financed campaigns led by candidates from the wealthier urban areas would undoubtedly have an advantage. Maddox needed support as did other rural legislators, therefore the AREA began a campaign fund drive to lend support to the underfunded campaigns. Maddox's campaign was even more important because Maddox chaired the powerful education committee in the state legislature. As chairman, he was able to use his position to influence legislators from more urban areas to lend their hands to preserving rural schools. In effect, his reelection was necessary for the survival of the rural schools.

In the beginning of the alliance against forced consolidation, leaders had promised that they would bring up the issue in every state-wide race of the election year. They did not fail in this promise. The most notable race of 1966 was the gubernatorial race which featured no incumbent since long-time governor Orville Faubus declined to seek another term. Instead, Arkansans were faced with an open field. The first fight in the gubernatorial race was the primary, then held in July. Since in those days the Democratic primary race was virtually the race for governor (this proving untrue in this year where the Republican party, after enduring almost a century of impotence, elected the first Republic governor since Reconstruction, Winthrop Rockefeller; but this was still months in the future) this was the race on

which the AREA centered its focus. The AREA decided to endorse Jim Johnson for his advocacy of local control of schools. In fact, Johnson released a statement of his views long before the AREA was fully organized in which he openly declared that "I am opposed to forced consolidation of school districts, based upon arbitrary decisions that would take from the people any of their inherent rights. . . it is my opinion that forced consolidation for the sake of consolidation, both in principal and in practice, is wrong." He based his conclusions on the issue on two issues: First, it would be the death- knell of communities which were centered around the schools. Second, urban school districts would be unfairly burdened with displaced rural children which would undoubtedly cause rising property taxes in the cities. This strong statement of intent on the part of the Johnson campaign met a rousing overture from the AREA. In a letter, Hershell Lee urged the other members of the organization to support Johnson and affirmed that "we are going to get this man in the Governor's chair and at the same time defeat this issue in the November General Election. Then, we can go back to running our schools rather than fight for the very life of our schools and communities. . . Remember, lasting victory is ours only if Justice Jim Johnson is elected Governor." Shortly after the endorsement, Johnson asked Lee to become his education advisor, a move that would further insure that the rural schools would have a voice in the campaign. Johnson won the Democratic nomination. Even Orville Faubus, who decided to go into retirement at the end of

the current term, spoke out against the proposal at the dedication of a bridge at Calico Rock arguing that the proposal was foolish and would bust the state's budget at a time when "bridges like this one and many roads are still to be built." Looking ahead to the future, Faubus noted that, with road and bridge construction, the smaller communities would grow in population as the transportation infrastructure improved. Ozbirn asked Faubus to continue campaigning for the AREA even after he retired, to which the governor replied, "Ozbirn, I am retiring to the hills, but if you need me I will come down out of those hills and go to bat for the rural schools."

On August 8, 1966, the AREA reversed its previous assertions that members have dual membership in the AREA and the AEA and also made a pitch for donations to fight the proposal in what would be a long campaign. The first issue that the executive board dealt with was money. Lee noted that the AREA's treasury contained $6,247, a far cry from the estimated $20,000 needed for the campaign. It was obvious that the organization needed more dues paying members to meet the budgetary demands, and steps should be taken to increase the publicity of the fight. Then, Lee got down to the more important issue facing the organization --- its policy on dual membership. The new policy among the leaders of the resistance was not that AREA members were prohibited from membership in the AEA, but that they would now be urged to withdraw in protest. He also urged members who decide to remain in the AEA to withhold their annual $10 dues from the AEA and instead give

them to the AREA. Announcing the new policy, Hershell Lee explained that "we turned this thing [consolidation] back March 12 in a fair fight. Then they put it on the November ballot. Now then we are serving notice that we are tired of an AEA leadership that no longer represents a majority." "We have been called radicals," he went further, "and that we are against everything that is good for education in Arkansas. We are for good education. We are for every child in the state. And we are for treating every child with respect and dignity." This move would clearly affect the AEA since 7,000 AREA members possessed dual membership in both organizations. Some members went so far as to return their AEA membership cards.

The latest attack by the AREA on the proposal did not miss Forrest Rozzell's attention. In a press conference in Little Rock, Rozzell blasted the opposition who, he argued, "want to preserve their power and status regardless of what happens to the children and teachers." He blasted the AREA by saying that the organization's moves were opposite of the correct strategy to improve the educational environment. In defense of the AEA, the executive director contended that the old educational organization's motives were "to improve the professional competence, increase the economic well being and protect the personal, professional and civic rights of all members of the education profession." One reporter at the press conference boldly asked Rozzell what the motives could possibly be for those teachers and

administrators to join the new organization. Rozzell, in a direct slur to the rural forces, blurted that the reason could be that the rustic educators preferred "the two-hour AREA meeting held Monday and the two and a half day meeting of the AEA at Arkadelphia." He also howled that the AREA was made up of mostly administrators with very few class room teachers involved. The primary objective, he added, "is to preserve the power and status of certain superintendents and school board members regardless of what happens to the children and teachers of these districts." Referring to the early August meeting of the AREA, he claimed that the organization planned to establish "an alleged professional education association to be controlled and dominated by superintendents and school board members from districts too small to provide comprehensive educational programs." These officials in the organization used "coercive powers" to force the teachers and administrators to contribute to the AREA. This was clearly illegal, the director boasted, since it was to fund a political campaign. In closing, Rozzell said, "It is an incontrovertible fact that literally thousands of children in Arkansas are being educationally short-changed as a result of inadequate school district organization." The battle lines for November were clearly drawn.

The AREA needed support from all sides if it were to be successful in its attempt to defeat the proposal. Karr Shannon, having written a good editorial against the petitioners in March, once again offered his services in an editorial in

late August where he predicted that the initiated act was "doomed for defeat. It is doubtful that it will carry in a dozen of the 75 counties." Furthermore, Shannon argued, "Those sponsoring the proposal confine their arguments to the advantages to the children of large consolidated units over smaller units, not taking into account the fact that compulsory consolidation, without any approval by vote of the people in the areas concerned, is a flagrant desecration of the democratic process. Nor do they take into account that the cost of such forced consolidation would, in many instances, be prohibitive." The debt issue involved in the proposal was emerging as an attack point for the opposition forces, and Shannon took up the banner, "In event the people should be burdened with a crash compulsory school consolidation program, there would be the necessity of vacating many school buildings now in use --- many in good condition, many still owed for. New and bigger buildings for the resultant larger districts would cost inestimable millions of dollars. This would necessitate spiraling of the bonded indebtedness and increased millage rates for debt service. And the bigger the millage for debt service, the less for teacher salaries and other expense of operation." Not only was Shannon speaking on an intellectual level by appealing to the voters' beliefs in representative government, he was also appealing to the voters' material beliefs --- the belief in the sovereignty of the pocket book. By writing this editorial in the Democrat, he was reaching an audience that would never have heard speeches given by the leadership of the AREA and,

therefore would have remained ignorant of the issue. Vital to the struggle was the press.

As part of the official campaign sponsored by the AREA, in September the organization ran a series of ads in every local newspaper in the state. The first ad in the series, with the heading "A MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE," put the issue in plain terms, "the forces that are trying to take the control of the public schools in the State of Arkansas are not all the far-away bureaucrats in the Federal government. Right here in our own state we have a group who think that they should make all the decisions about what the local people do about their school problems." The modus operandi of the consolidation movement, the ad continued, was quantity not quality. The proposed act seems to treat student enrollment as the sole criteria for the student's educational achievement. It does not address the fact that there exist schools with large enrollments that do not have quality educational programs. Why would the AEA back this proposal? The answer is plain, the ad asserted, that "they [the AEA] are interested only in making large administrational units which are easy to control because of their lack of contact with the people involved. Control and not educational improvement is their ultimate aim." Seeing a bleak future under the initiative, the advertisement prophesied "If these people win and this Act becomes a law, then every two years the same thing will come up until there is nothing left but large masses of students riding buses four hours and learning nothing but how

to move along with the mass and take orders when their number is called." Such an image no doubt frightened the electorate about the possible result of the issue and energized those who had not taken a stand to come down on the side of the rural forces.

While this issue has so far dealt with the AREA leadership, but what about the average school administrator? There were many supporters of the organization from among the smaller school districts as can be discerned from the membership rolls. Many of these administrators had in fact supported school consolidation in the past, but they had changed their minds in regards to the 1966 initiative. The change in view can be illustrated in the stand taken by the school supervisor of the White County School District. In September, 1966, he was compelled to express his views toward the initiative in an official bulletin. The reason why he decided to take a firm stand on the issue resulted from the fact that in 1948, his first year as supervisor, he "was guilty of trying to be on both sides" of the consolidation issue with the result that "both factions were angry with me. Then and there, I took a pledge with myself that in the future, when questions arose, I would do my best to select what I considered to be the right side in the controversy, then make no effort to hide that judgement." Since he had taken a tepid stand for consolidation in 1948, he was undoubtedly questioned over his reversal in opinion. He admitted to his previous endorsement of the issue but, he added, there is a limit to how much

sovereignty communities could give up "without losing their identity." He backed his assertions with his personal past experience: "We were having difficulties because the officials of my religious denomination had seen fit to merge our pastorate with that of Kensett, thereby spreading the efficiency of our preacher so thin that we were obviously being weakened. An interesting aspect of these amputations is that in almost every instance we are assured that they are designed to 'help' us." Bigger is not better, it hurts the small communities which had prided themselves on their independence, and this independence would be severely threatened by an "urban mind without the slightest concept of small town life." Returning to his support of the 1948 act, he argued that the current proposal had little in common with it. The first consolidation proposal was designed to eliminate school districts that obviously did not meet state guidelines; many of those districts did not even have high schools. The initiative currently before the voters was simply concerned with student enrollment; whether or not the districts could adequately meet the educational needs of their students was not an issue. He added that the idea of consolidation was to divisive an issue for the AEA to be concerned with, instead it should focus on more lofty goals like teachers' salaries, etc.

By September, 1966, it was an established fact that Initiated Act #1 would appear on the ballot in November — or was it? As with most petition drives, there were immediate challenges as to its legality. In a last ditch effort to keep the issue

off the ballot, the AREA officials charged that the petitions contained many questionable signatures. This attack held little weight, though, and the issue was destined to be voted on by the public. However, James A. Martin saw cause for optimism citing the petitions themselves. After studying the petitions with Rex Bayliss, superintendent of the Cotter School District, he found that most of the signatures came from residents of Pulaski County, the highest populated county in the state. Furthermore, of the petitioners, none but a few came from districts which would be affected by the consolidation act. A quick study of two counties, White and Jackson counties, shows the lopsided support by residents in the more populous areas for the measure. In Jackson county, the vast majority of the signatures came from Newport, where the population was well above the minimum; likewise in White county where most signatures came from Searcy. In addition, the three people in charge of the petition drive in White county were residents of Pulaski County.

Although the AEA had firmly put its support behind the consolidation act, it had not formally endorsed the issue. On October 1, 1966, the AEA remedied this in a meeting at Hall High School in Little Rock. In sharp contrast to the March meeting, this meeting was far from united among the AEA leadership. The first issue that came before the meeting was a vote to endorse salary raises for teachers. Yet, when the consolidation issue was introduced in the session, the wheels of unity

came off the wagon. The issue divided the AEA sharply and this was shown by the "chorus of 'noes'" when the issue came up for a vote. Terrence E. Powell, principle of Hall High School asked for a standing vote, but was shouted down and the motion was declared approved. The issue had been clearly rammed down the throats of the AEA membership despite the growing opposition from within the organization.

The less than enthusiastic endorsement was greeted with vigilance by the AREA forces as they united to fight the proposal through the last month of the campaign. President Hershell Lee called for a state-wide meeting to be held on October 15 at the Marion Hotel in Little Rock (they hoped that this time there would be no mix-up in the reservation as their had been back in February) to "give each of us a sense of direction in our attempts to defeat this act." Knowing that the fight of their lives was at hand, Hershell Lee urged all members to attend the meeting and also "for each of us to win four people over to our side and get the ones we have won to get four more people and so on. If we did this, it would be so that nearly every person in the state would gave been asked to vote against the act." If the meeting had low attendance then Rozzell and the rest of the consolidation forces would be able to declare an early victory because their opponents had not been able to gather enough support for their cause. Lee hoped that the meeting would signal to the media and the people of Arkansas that they were earnest in their opposition to the act, "I realize that if as many people come as I have invited, we will not be

able to seat everyone. That will be just fine. Those who can't get seats can either stand or go shopping."

The meeting, by both numerical standards and enthusiasm, was successful. 300 AREA members packed into the Marion Hotel ballroom to hear numerous speakers exhort them to action. The first speaker, appropriately, was co-founder James A. Martin, who opened the meeting by making a dire prediction — if the measure passed in November, "one-hundred and twenty-nine communities will be made ghost towns" while the politicos in Little Rock tighten their grip of power on the rural school districts. Ode Maddox, who had defeated two challengers in the primaries due to AREA support, echoed Martin when he mounted the podium: "Don't let anybody tell you that if you abolish a school, the community will continue, because it will not. You might as well roll up the streets." Maddox told the crowd that the AREA had created campaign packets which contained pamphlets and bumper stickers which would be mailed to AREA members who were interested in passing them out among the community. Wade Ozbirn, calling the proposal "the school destruction act," urged members to encourage county supervisors to fight along side the superintendents. Hershell Lee followed Maddox with orders for the troops that they should work diligently in their communities to fight consolidation; he would take on the AEA leadership thereby freeing the citizens to concentrate on the local level. "Don't you worry about Forrest Rozzell and Hubert Blanchard

[assistant secretary of the AEA]," he blasted, "because every time they open their mouths I'll jump down their throats so far you'll have to get a helicopter to come and get me." Knowing the political clout that the new organization had developed, Republican gubernatorial candidate Winthrop Rockefeller asked if he could speak to the meeting and express his opposition to the act. Being a political candidate means long hours and difficult schedules and when Rockefeller learned that his campaign schedule would not allow him to attend the meeting, he informed Lee of his views against forced consolidation and Lee announced these to the assembly. While not openly endorsing Rockefeller for governor, the announcement at the meeting no doubt drew some voters to the candidacy.

The Achilles heal for the opposition forces was that they had not fully demonstrated that the small rural schools could provide a quality education. The AREA had pounded the podium that the proposal would destroy communities, but this left them open to criticism from the AEA that they ignored the quality education issue. The Gazette published some reports issued by the Center for Southern Education Studies at George Peabody College for Teachers on October 16 which lent support to the myth that rural schools could not adequately educate students. The main points of the reports were that the rural schools were costlier and more dependent on state and federal aid, the smaller school districts did not have qualified teachers, On October 20, armed with an advertisement by Arkansas Power

& Light which listed the top twenty college graduates in the state, Maddox and Martin set out to demonstrate that the rural schools could provide a quality education for their students. Of the top twenty college graduates in the state of 1966, six were from schools which be affected by the proposal. This advertisement belied the myth that the smaller schools could not provide an outstanding education for Arkansas students and, in Ode Maddox's words, showed that "small schools and small rural areas furnish to our state's fine citizenry their share of well-educated people." The reader may be wondering how such a claim could be made that the schools were turning out a large number of honor students, after all the list only cited six students out of twenty. However, when one considers that these small school districts only had ten percent of the total school age population, yet provided over ten percent of the honor students in higher education, it becomes clear that the case was strong in favor of the rural schools. The second charge, that rural schools drain resources from state funds, was also untrue. Maddox cited a study which showed that 129 small schools which would be affected by the proposal cost $135,000 above the minimum funding formula while the 12 largest districts cost $730,000 above the formula. Therefore, according to the evidence, the charges in the Peabody study were without basis.

As a part of the campaign against the proposal, the AREA funded a series of ads to be run in newspapers around the state to drum up anger among the local

citizens to fight the act. The ads were to stress three points: 1) the act threatens local control of education; 2) people should vote since their children could not; 3) the children should know where they will go to school — the act does not make this clear. The first ad which ran for the week of October 17 expounded on the local control issue stating that "Its purpose is to by-pass the will of the people on the local level. . . control the schools and you can control the minds of the next generation." The next week's ad argued that if the act passed "your child may well spend as much time on the school bus as he does in the class room." The week of October 31, the last full week before the election was headed with a banner headline: "YOUR CHILD CAN'T VOTE" and compelled voters with the opening statement, "Your child can't vote to save his school from being taken over by the school-grabbers, but you can." No doubt, the constant advertising would galvanize the rural communities into action against consolidation.

As stated earlier, the drive to defeat the proposal in 1966 was in many cases an introduction to statewide politics for the small school officials. Although financially weak, the officials defended their small districts and were thankful that they had a statewide organization to shield them from the consolidation drive. John W. Lowe, superintendent of Fourche Valley Schools in Briggsville, Arkansas wrote to President Martin in October that "We are very proud of the work that you are doing and hope that you will be able to defeat this amendment. . . We realize that

we are a small school district and cannot do much in regard to numbers, but we are doing everything we can." In Snow Lake, Arkansas, the superintendent of Snow Lake Elementary Schools wrote Martin, "With all the campaigning, mud slinging and all the misrepresentations concerning the feasibility of consolidation and its advantages, we the little people, are really up against it. . . I have thought of joining the AREA and would like to know more about it and to whom must I write for membership. Not that I want to discredit the AEA, for I do not, but as a Principal of The So Called small, rural schools, I feel it to my advantage, and the schools, to do so." This is only a sample of the dozens of letters sent to Martin by school officials from around the state thanking him and the AREA for their help. One can only guess how the campaign would have fared without a large organization to stop consolidation in its tracks.

The industrious Ode Maddox came up with a very effective plan to enlist support from alumni of small schools. He urged all superintendents to go and look up their old files of students and locate where the alumni were. The superintendents should then write the alumni a letter arguing against the consolidation measure and urging their support. What was more significant about this letter writing campaign was that it would galvanize those former students who had moved to urban areas like Little Rock to campaign among their friends in the city. All the rural voters in the state would not have the voting power that those in the city would. Therefore,

this was an effective plan to draw voters in the less rural regions of the state. Once Maddox sent out the letters for alumni from Oden, he was surprised at how many of them lived in Hot Springs and who pledged their support for their old school district. Maddox estimated that the letters had a ninety percent rate of success for reaching alumni and getting them to campaign on the AREA's behalf.

The last two weeks of the campaign were trying times for the Arkansas Education Association. While they were the largest educational organization in the state, their resources were limited and they began to reach the bottom of their resources by the end of the campaign. On October 21, the Gazette ran a story that said that the AEA only had $1,000 left in their budget to support the proposal. Since modern campaigns are in many ways subordinated to monetary concerns, the scarcity of funds can prove fatal — and in this case there is evidence to the affirmative. Even thirty years ago, money made or destroyed campaigns due to the cost of advertising and travel. However, due to the lack of financial resources, the consolidation forces would not be able to utilize radio or television advertising and would have to rely on word of mouth alone. In order to stimulate the word of mouth campaign, the AEA issued a small pamphlet titled "The Link" propounding the "advantages" of consolidation which was distributed to the 15,000 members of the organization. Joshua Shepherd, announcing the new publication at a press conference, hoped that this would turn the tide in support of the proposal, with the

belief that "Initiated Act 1 will be approved if the voters understand it." With hindsight, however, the reader should realize that the more voters understood the proposal, the more opposed they became to it. Almost at the same time that the AEA was issuing its pamphlet in support of the act, Orville Faubus came out against the proposal arguing that "quality is more important than size. I think some small schools are better than larger ones in quality." When asked about Faubus' statement and the lack of support from the two candidates for governor, Shepherd downplayed the idea that the support from political figures was necessary to the survival of the consolidation drive, "I'm not prepared to analyze what motivates politicians." The signs were clear that the proposal was in trouble.

While the AEA's funds would not allow them to advertise as they might have liked, they had the support of the editor of the Arkansas Gazette who used his newspaper to push for the act. In one editorial, he wrote that the AREA's fight against the proposal was "worthy of the crassest sort of campaign." In defense of the opposition, James O'Dell, the chairman of the political activities committee in the AREA, wrote the editor that "if the leadership of the A. R. E. A. did not speak in language as 'dispassionate as possible' it may well be that they are aware of the opposition and know, as any good general does, that you must fight the enemy in the manner in which he is going to fight you or you let him choose the battle ground." In response to the charge that the small districts were holdouts from an earlier time

and the small schools needed to be consolidated, O'Dell wrote that "Any district that feels the need to consolidate may do so with very little effort. . . The machinery for consolidating districts is already on the law books." The language that the AREA used to fight the proposal was justified, he continued, "Let's be frank, not dispassionate. This is an attempt to continue the move toward centralization and regimentation that is being pushed by the 'liberal' element in all levels of our society." Lyle Wood, a school board member in Flippin, Arkansas, also felt compelled to pen a scathing letter and blasted the Gazette editor with the statement, "I guess I have been under the wrong impression, or it might be lack of education (I attended a small school), but I had always thought that the editor of a newspaper had the right to state his own opinions in an editorial, but it was also his duty to cover the news and report the facts without prejudice." By late October, the AREA was poised to take their first victory.

In the last week of October, the AREA presented a full half hour television program exposing the flaws in the proposal on five television stations ranging from Fort Smith to El Dorado featuring James Martin as the host. Airing during the prime time hours, the telecast reached more people than the usual printed press would allow and this last push against the proposal certainly persuaded many to the cause. One man, a Jonesboro businessman named Ralph Childs, was so impressed by the professional appearance of the program that he wrote Martin, "The facts that you

brought out were very good and I would like to personally commend you in doing a fine job. . . My family and I and many friends with whom I talk will be instructed to vote against Act #1." Surely, political junkies in the 1990's recognize the importance of television advertising, but in the 1960's political advertising was still a developing strategy; although the ad campaign Lyndon Johnson ran against Barry Goldwater may have decided the election of 1964, this was a national campaign — Arkansas would not enjoy such effective campaigning until the late 1970's, but this ad no doubt showed the potential of political advertising on television.

Within the AREA, a small controversy was emerging over endorsements of political candidates, more specifically the governor's race. The AREA had endorsed Jim Johnson in the Democratic primary in July and many AREA members assumed that the endorsement held for the general election as well. In this groundbreaking year, Winthrop Rockefeller had amassed what would be a winning coalition of anti-segregationist African-Americans, whites, and rural voters, many of whom were supporters of the AREA. Thus, many of the AREA members were concerned over what they considered to be an automatic endorsement of a candidate over their wishes and, in the waning days of the campaign, they wrote a stream of letters to the AREA leadership to express their dissatisfaction with the endorsement. James J. Patterson, a member of the AREA's political action committee, responded with a form letter sent to all members which denied that the AREA had endorsed any

candidate for governor. "The AREA official board has never endorsed any one candidate for governor. . . At a meeting in May we made a statement saying we favored the candidates who were against forced consolidation. Jim Johnson forces in AREA have tried to promote their candidate at the expense of AREA," he argued. Patterson assailed the Johnson campaign for misleading the AREA that Johnson was the only candidate against consolidation, despite the fact that Rockefeller had openly attacked the proposal. This, in turn, created the misunderstanding within the AREA over the gubernatorial campaigns and created the friction within the organization. Patterson tried to ease the tensions with his letter, "It is not my desire to create a schism in AREA. We need all of our people working against ACT 1. This letter is only to inform you that the AREA Board has endorsed no candidate and is asking only that folks vote against Initiated Act 1." Frictions caused by the gubernatorial race may have been soothed to an extent, yet politics is always a contentious issue and one should not assume that the problem was corrected by the letter.

Despite the turmoil surrounding the governor's race, the AREA continued to press for defeat of the proposal. The afore mentioned Karr Shannon wrote two hard-hitting editorial letters to the Arkansas Democrat, calling the proposal "a brazen bid for centralized government control and outright dictatorship." How can the people of Arkansas support such an initiative, he asked, that takes control of local schools away from the local citizenry and places it in the hands of bureaucrats

in the State Board of Education? Furthermore, and this was a novel argument against the act, at a time when the federal government in Washington was attempting to gain control of state educational policy, the proposal only was another attempt by "self anointed" "ivory-tower school leaders" to muddy the waters and grab for what ever power was left after the federal take-over. Shannon was emerging as one of the loudest, if not most convincing, voices of the opposition.

Again, the supporters of the consolidation measure continued to argue in favor of the proposal up to the day of the election. The Gazette, perhaps smarting over the savage letter written by Lyle Wood, published a front page editorial the day before the election in which the author, who did not give his name, urged voters to vote for the proposal. The anonymous author contended that the voter who did not vote for the proposal "may not care enough" about the educational future of their children. Playing on the rural pronunciation of the word, "again," the author, and one could assume that it was the editor of the Gazette, referred to the opposition as "agin-ers" hoping to portray the AREA and associates as uneducated curmudgeons who were attempting to protect an out-dated educational system. Such polemic discourse had become common in the history of elections, and the editorial was obviously an example of the decline of reasoned argument in the political process.

Election day finally came. With all the preparation for the election finished, people on both sides of the issue waited as the returns began trickling in on the

evening of November 8. The results were astounding. Not only did the issue go down to overwhelming defeat, but it also was defeated in those voting districts where it was expected to win. For instance, polls showed the initiative to have a sizable lead in Pulaski County; if there had been a lead, that lead crumbled between the time the poll was taken and election day. One might assume that the last minute media blitz by the opposition played a role in the sudden turnabout in popular opinion, it is impossible that the television spots shown in the largest populated area in Arkansas did not have an effect on the voting patterns. Pulaski County aside, the rest of the state showed almost unanimous disaffection with the proposal; 95 percent of the voters elsewhere in the state turned down the proposal. In the end, the vote was 82,216 for the initiative and 227,266 against.

Immediately, the consolidation supporters began to search for a reason that the initiative, that they felt would win by a large margin, failed. Arch Ford, commissioner of the State Board of Education, blamed the AREA ploy at the March meeting of the AEA where they introduced the amendment which raised the minimum school population to 2,000. McClurkin's presence at the meeting, Ford argued, was "for the sole purpose of killing the AEA initiated act. . . He accomplished this objective." "He appeal[ed] to the professional pride of the delegates," he continued, "He sold them the idea of substituting an impractical, and impossible proposal for the relatively modest act under consideration." However,

Ford did not recognize in his condemnation of McClurkin that the amendment adopted at the meeting was eventually dropped for the general election. The only effect on the voters of the amendment was to show that the AEA intended to raise the population requirements in the future. But, it is common for the losers in an election to find a place to channel blame. "It just means that some 35,000 children will have to wait two or four years longer," Joshua Shepherd insisted, "I think people will realize in the next two years that their children are being deprived of the preparation they need."

In the past, organizations of educators in rural areas had disbanded once the goal had been accomplished. This was an option that faced the AREA leadership in the days following the successful fight against the initiative. Almost unanimously, the leaders decided that it would be unwise to close down the organization due to the fact that rural citizens still needed a vehicle for voicing the needs of rural educational systems. Martin, in a letter to AREA members, addressed the issue at length, arguing, "We have only won the battle, we have not won the war. There will be a greater need now for closer cooperation and work for all members than we have had even up to now." He urged members to not rest; they should get involved in helping the AREA grow into a much stronger force in educational policy-making. This would entail actively urging state legislators to support policies that would be beneficial to rural areas, getting better representation of small school

districts in the State Department of Education, and working with local officials to make the school districts work more efficiently. The work would require large amounts of time and energy, which could only be accomplished through a state-wide network of people dedicated to the task. Martin warned that the constant vigilance shown by the AREA members in the campaign against forced consolidation should not diminish, "I would caution all of us not to become cocky or arrogant even in the face of our overwhelming victory. The only reason we could have won was that we must have been close to right and we had a tremendous sympathy vote among the large school districts and large population centers." Those voters can not be counted on, he continued, to support the small districts without the encouragement of AREA members.

Dozens of letters of congratulation and appreciation arrived in James Martin's mailbox. In return, Martin sent out a series of letters to AREA members and supporters to thank them for their constant work. The campaign of 1966 would not have been such a rousing success had the rural schools not united under a common goal. With this success, the AREA began looking ahead to ameliorating the problems that beset small schools. For one, the organization began to negotiate with the Department of Education in order to raise the standards of schools that were below the level for accreditation to meet state guidelines. It also set its sights on solving many funding problems for the rural schools by lobbying for a more equitable school tax system. All of these jobs loomed ominously on the horizon. The organization had defeated the Goliath,

however, and it would continue to be strong in the face of slim odds in the future.

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Brian Irby